



Arizona State Board of Nursing

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An advisory opinion adopted by AZBN is an interpretation of what the law requires. While an advisory opinion is not law, it is more than a recommendation. In other words, an advisory opinion is an official opinion of AZBN regarding the practice of nursing as it relates to the functions of nursing. Facility policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations related to competency, validation, training, and supervision to assure the safety of their patient population and or decrease risk.

OPINION: DEATH, ASSESSMENT OF
APPROVED: X NOT APPROVED:
DATE: 5/94
REVISED DATE: 1/02, 3/06, 11/07
ORIGINATING COMMITTEE:
LEGAL LEGISLATIVE

ADVISORY OPINION DEATH, ASSESSMENT OF

It is within the Scope of Practice for a Registered Nurse (RN) to assess a patient's death.

I. General Requirements

This advisory opinion attempts to clarify the various levels of medical and nursing recognition of the condition of a patient's death. First and foremost, only a licensed physician or a nurse practitioner who has completed education and documentation requirements prescribed by the Arizona State Board of Nursing may actually certify a person's cause of death. According to ARS 36-325 (G), "If a person under the current care of a physician or nurse practitioner for a potentially fatal illness dies of that illness, the physician or nurse practitioner, if available, shall complete and sign the medical certification of death on a death certificate within seventy-two hours."

According to ARS 32-1601 (13)(a), the definition of professional nursing includes, "Diagnosing and treating human responses to actual or potential health problems." By this statute a registered professional nurse has the authority to make an assessment and therefore, a pronouncement of death. A registered nurse's assessment or pronouncement of death does not include the medical certification of death. Additionally, institutional policy may also guide the nurse's role in the assessment of death.

Regarding the role of the licensed practical nurse in this matter, ARS 32-1601 (12) (a) states that practical nursing includes activities that are performed under the supervision of a physician or a registered nurse and contributing to the assessment of the health status of individuals and groups. While a practical nurse contributes to the assessment of patients they may not make the final assessment of death but should report these findings to the RN, physician or nurse practitioner for verification and actual assessment or pronouncement of death.

RATIONALE

A registered nurse (RN) is able to assess a patient's death and therefore pronounce death based on the assessment skills of the RN and the employer's policy and procedures.

REFERENCES

Lynne-McHale Wiegand, D.J., and Carlson, K.K., American Association of Critical Care Nurses, Procedure Manual for Critical Care, 5th Edition, 2005, Saunders Elsevier, Inc., pp. 1174-1182

Arizona Revised Statutes, 2006; ARS 36-325 (G), ARS 32-1601 (13)(a), ARS 32-1601 (12)

Physicians' Handbook on Medical Certificate of Death, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003, p.63